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ABSTRACT

The life adjustment movement began in 1945 as the result of a resolution offered at a conference for vocational educators. In response to this resolution, the National Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth was formed. The commission subsequently formulated a definition of life adjustment education that viewed the purpose of life adjustment curricula as that of a means to equip all Mexican youth to live democratically and with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as homemakers, workers, and citizens. Especially geared toward high school students who were not in a college preparatory or vocational track, the life adjustment movement represented a shift toward a more generalized form of vocational training that was described in the Smith-Hughes Act. Life adjustment education, the first of a series of federal educational policy initiatives began after World War II, was an action--rather than theory-oriented movement. One of the most successful life adjustment courses was that of the core curriculum course most often taught at the junior high school level. Education as a preparation for work was a key life adjustment objective that resulted in an increased emphasis on business education, in the development of special core courses devoted to job search and vocational adjustment, and in the spread of school-work programs. (MN)

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GO DIRECTLY TO LIFE: THE CAMPAIGN FOR A LIFE ADJUSTMENT CURRICULUM

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GO DIRECTLY TO LIFE: THE CAMPAIGN FOR A LIFE ADJUSTMENT CURRICULUM

Introduction

From 1945 until 1953 the idea of education for life adjustment was an important part of the discussion about the purpose and program of American education. Life adjustment education was described in several full length texts and in hundreds of articles in practitioner oriented journals, and was the topical theme of numerous national education conferences and of workshops and meetings at the state and local level. It was also the focus of the work of twenty-nine state organized education committees and two national commissions.[1] Our knowledge of this movement is limited, however, because historians who write about twentieth century American education either omit or only briefly mention it, and because we assume perhaps that the devastating critiques of life adjustment by Bestor and Hofstadter have addressed the topic sufficiently.[2] There is a tendency to dismiss life adjustment education too easily, as Cremin did when he concluded that it was a "victim of its own ill-chosen name," or to analyze it incompletely as Kliebard did when he characterized the life adjustment movement as an "interesting episode in the development of the social-efficiency rationale for curriculum reform."[3] Since I began this study, Diane Ravitch's The Troubled Crusade appeared and helped to remedy these deficiencies, and this paper seeks to continue that effort.[4]

As an organized educational movement, life adjustment education had several less well known consequences which, though not the focus of this paper, are worthy of brief mention and additional investigation. For

instance, life adjustment proposals elevated the role of guidance to a central place in the activity of schools, and argued that the counselor's interest in the whole child and data yielded by guidance techniques provide the model for all instructional interactions and curriculum development appropriate to the needs of students.[5] Further study is needed to clarify the relationship of life adjustment education to the rejection of vocational assessment as the main activity of school guidance, and to the emergence of the counseling model as the dominant and preferred conception of guidance work. Standard accounts of the evolution of the guidance profession have not taken this perspective into account.[6]

Another lesser known outcome of life adjustment education was its role in assimilating Catholic educators into the American pedagogical and curricular mainstream. Because Catholic secondary education had been traditionally formalistic and discipline centered, and because life adjustment education theory was devoid of any religious or spiritual dimensions, it was surprising to learn that at the third national life adjustment conference held in 1950 one-sixth of the participants were Catholic school educators.[7] By 1954, thirty-four dioceses and the District of Columbia reported school based life adjustment activities.[8] A Christian family living curriculum devloped by the Presentation Sisters in San Francisco and a secondary core curriculum developed at Archbishop Williams High School in Braintree, Massachusetts were among the well known curriculum projects frequently cited in Catholic and non-Catholic life adjustment materials.[9]

Catholic participation in life adjustment education may have been a small turning point in the history of American education. Life adjustment brought public and Catholic school educators together intellectually and through joint participation in a number of projects in a way that had not

happened before. The heritage of public and Catholic school conflict was blunted somewhat after a century of hostility and mistrust. Since the life adjustment movement, Catholic schools have joined and been welcomed into a number of efforts to solve national problems through educational means. Because of the life adjustment movement, educational pluralism, if not celebrated by all, has become more of a possibility. This outcome, and the period when it began, is worth further attention.

Life adjustment opened the door to participation by Catholic educators in various innovative pedagogical movements. Indeed, once begun, Catholic educators have often gone farther or faster in classroom and school wide experimentation than their public school counterparts. A public school-Catholic school comparison of the range and depth of life adjustment experimentation would enhance our knowledge of both systems.

The Campaign for a Life Adjustment Curriculum

The life adjustment movement began on June 1, 1945, the result of a resolution offered by Charles Prosser at a conference for vocational educators held in Washington, D.C. In this resolution, Prosser argued that the schools could prepare effectively the 20 percent of the students who entered college, and the 20 percent who entered skilled occupations, but, the resolution continued,

> We do not believe that the remaining 60 percent of our youth of secondary school age will receive the life adjustment training they need and to which they are entitled as American citizens--unless and until the administrators of public education with the assistance of the vocational education leaders formulate a comparable program for this group.[10]

The resolution went on to call for conferences to address the problem and to develop such a program. The Commissioner of Education accepted this proposal, with the result that regional conferences were held in 1946 in New York, Chicago, Cheyenne, Sacramento, and Birmingham. These conferences confirmed

the sentiment that secondary schools failed a majority of students, and suggested that the failure could be reversed through functional, experienced based curricula, expanded guidance, supervised work experiences, and the wholehearted support of this approach by teachers and the community. The next step was a national conference held in Chicago in May, 1947, to develop practical action plans to achieve the acceptance of these ideas in the schools. Prosser was also present at this conference, and closed the meeting with this rather dramatic exhortation:

> Never was there such a meeting where people were so sincere in their belief that this was the golden opportunity to so something that would give to all American youth their educational heritage so long denied. What you have planned is worth fighting for--it is worth dying for. . . .[11]

In the two years since the already famous Prosser Resolution, the concept of life adjustment education for the "neglected 60 percent" had evolved into a program for all youth. Moreover, the means to achieve this program was to be a National Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth. This approach was proposed at the Chicago conference, was accepted by the Commissioner of Education, and implemented by December, 1947.

The Commission, made up of nine members representing major educational organizations, formulated a definition of life adjustment education that was subsequently used by most people associated with this movement:

> Life adjustment education is designed to equip all American youth to live democratically with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as home members, workers, and citizens. It is concerned especially with a sizable proportion of youth of high-school age (both in school and out) whose objectives are less well served by our schools than the objectives of preparation for either a skilled occupation or higher education.[12]

Rather definitively, the Commission elevated three elements of one's life experiences as most worthy of attention and education for everyone, but "especially" wanting it for a large and less intellectually able group of students.

Commission members and support staff from the Office of Education took an activist role in promoting life adjustment education. They spoke at conferences, wrote articles and other descriptive materials, and served as regional and national consultants. They were, in the words of their chair, Benjamin Willis, Yonkers Superintendent, "attempting to stimulate the mobilization of educational forces on a broad front for a persistent and continued attack on the problems of secondary education."[13] Both the tone and the specific language of the writings of the Office of Education staff indicate the fervor of their commitment; they were, in short, engaged in a monumental "campaign."[14] Staff members were enthusiastic and productive. Everywhere one looks one finds speeches, articles, and chapters by the same people; J. Dan Hull; Galen Jones; Walter Gaumnitz; and Raymond Gregory. Contemporaries observed that life adjustment supporters were engaged in a "crusade."[15]

The organizational strategy adopted by the Commission had two components. First, the Commission determined that it would work through state departments of education to identify and assist specific cooperating schools that established life adjustment programs. To assist schools in meeting the criteria to become a cooperating school, the Commission also established connections to national professional associations and to teacher training institutions. By 1950, twenty states had established or designated committees to work with the Commission, and nine additional states joined that group during the existence of the Second Life Adjustment Commission (1950-1953). The second part of the strategy was to collect and publicize information about schools that developed life adjustment programs, to create, in other words, a supportive network of institutions involved in a common cause.[16]

From the beginning the Office of Education created what could be characterized as a "cookbook approach" to establishing life adjustment education. Their 1949 pamphlets "Getting State Programs of Life Adjustment Under Way," and "Developing Life Adjustment Education in a Local School" initiated a series of "how to" speeches and articles that provided information that was quite detailed and often trivial.[17] Life adjustment education was to be a local undertaking, but the basic principles of democratic leadership, school wide planning, experienced based curricula, an enhanced role for guidance, the appropriate use of consultants, and increased community support, were consistently advocated.

There were two aspects of the campaign to establish life adjustment education that deserve more attention. The first is that this movement represented a shift toward a more generalized form of vocational training in contrast to the more specific purposes of vocational education established by the Smith-Hughes Act. Life adjustment was designed to equip all youth to live a satisfactory life as workers. An early "common understanding" among life adjustment educators was the statement in the movement's first major publication (1948) that "life adjustment is impossible unless occupational adjustment occurs."[18] The Report of the First Commission on Life Adjustment was to the point when it asserted that "all pupils can profit by work experience."[19] Given Charles Prosser's authorship of the Smith-Hughes Act, and given his role as the inspriational founder of life adjustment education, the connection seems obvious. Yet a recent, extensive, study on vocationalism in America does not mention life adjustment even once.[20] This omission seems inappropriate given the sentiment expressed

by the Assistant Commissioner for Vocational Education in 1951 that because of life adjustment "we are now on the verge of a movement in secondary education that may be the most profound that has taken place since the inauguration of vocational education...."[21] In its modern form general vocational education is called career education, yet insufficient attention has been paid to the movement that helped bring this contemporary trend into existence.

A second aspect of the campaign for life adjustment that seems noteworthy is that this movement was the first of the series of federal educational policy initiatives begun after World War II. A strategy was devised to reach the nation's schools through the fervid and prolific pens of federal education officials, by the omnipresence of those same officials at national and regional professional meetings, and through the creation of strategic alliances with state educational leaders. If this process sounds familiar it is because it is identical to the pattern followed by the federal education officers in the 1970's in both the career education and mainstreaming movements and is continuing today on behalf of excellence in education. This similarity suggests that the life adjustment movement could provide excellent material for a case study on the recently developed leadership role of the federal government in educational affairs.

While many descriptions of life adjustment education's basic principles were developed, the most succint yet complete analysis listed seven criteria for evaluating life adjustment programs. According to this list, such programs (1) respect individual worth and personality; (2) seek to enroll and retain all youth; (3) provide common learning experiences organized around the problems of living; (4) emphasize direct experiences; (5) provide

democratic planning, organization, operation, and planning; (6) make constructive use of records and data; and (7) provide for evaluation in terms of desirable changes in pupil behavior.[22] Although each criterion is important for understanding of some aspect of life adjustment education, the phrases "common learning experience," "problems of living" and "direct experience" are the most germane to an understanding of life adjustment curriculum development. Virtually no life adjustment supporter felt the need to justify or theorize about these concepts; they existed, as Cremin and Ravitch note, as part of the conventional wisdom accessible to all 20th century progressive educators.[23] Indeed, in explaining that life adjustment education would be an action rather than theory oriented movement, the Report of the First Commission on Life Adjustment Education devoted nearly 20 percent of its total narrative to the history of recent demands for functional, general education, and focused particular attention on the Seven Cardinal Principles, New Deal youth programs, and the series of pronouncements of the Educational Policies Commission.[24] Life adjustment educators were keenly aware of the progressive experimentation that had taken place in the 1930's and felt that they were simply carrying on that tradition.[25] Prosser stated the argument quite clearly: "some progress has been made in curriculum development, [but] little reform will be accomplished unless and until the subject matter of high school becomes functioning subject matter for life.[26] For Prosser, life-adjustment rather than college preparatory subjects should be the core of the curriculum. "Instead of catering to the one of six graduates who goes directly to college,"he argued, "this far more democratic scheme would cater to the five who go directly to life...."[27]

Life adjustment educators agreed with the analysis and sought to orient all curriculum to real life problems and to reorganize every course so that it contributed to the life adjustment of all students.[28]

An alternative to the total life adjustment approach that was more successfully introduced into schools was the establishment of a common learnings or core curriculum course most often taught at the junior high school level. It was in the core course, often created by combining the former English and Social Studies offering, that the major effort was made to achieve the citizenship goals of life adjustment education. These courses emphasized human relations, group building activities, personal problems in a social setting, and knowledge of an involvement in the community.[29] A widely known series of junior high booklets published by Science Research Associates illustrate content resources for the core. Booklet titles like You and Your Problems, Let's Talk About Honesty, Clubs for Fun, How to Get Along With Others, Exploring Your Community, and Citizenship for Boys and Girls, suggest some intended outcomes of a common learnings course.

As noted earlier, education as a preparation for work was a key life adjustment objective, one that had several curriculum consequences. One was an increased emphasis on Business Education and on the claim that some of its content like typing and bookkeeping was essential for all students.[30] A second consequence was the development of special courses, or units in high school core courses, with titles like "The Problems of Making a Living" and "How to Get a Job and Hold it."[31] Among the Science Research Associates booklets for senior high students were several that pertained to this area:

for example, Our World of Work: What Employers Want; and Getting Job Experience.

A third significant way in which life adjustment educators sought to prepare students for employment was through an enthusiastic endorsement of school-work programs. With the detail characteristic of many life adjustment written sources, two authors who developed a chapter on this topic suggested six benefits to the student and seven for the school and community when properly organized school-work programs exist. Properly organized here means creating an advisory committee, providing a coordinator, and establishing a placement service. "The time [was] long overdue" these experts concluded, "when our schools must extend this phase of life adjustment to every youth."[32]

Life adjustment education sought to prepare youth to live appropriately as citizens, workers, and home members, and this last area also made claims for a more honored space in the curriculum. Home economics in general and specific courses in home family living were major beneficiaries of life adjustment education. Appropriately so, argued one team of home economists, because there was no area "more urgent than the need for sound, practical education for home and family living, since in a democracy the family 'holds the first place as the creator and guardian of human values.'"[33] Others argued that this area was important because to deny youth the knowledge they needed for home living was "to jeopardize unduly our national security."[34] This assertion may be tempered by the reality of a two-page life adjustment homemaking article in which one learns that (1) it is permissible to allow students to adjust recipes to fit the size of their families; (2) setting an

attractive table when you live in a trailer requires extra thought; and that (3) requiring handmade buttonholes when machine made ones are perfectly acceptable is old fashioned.[35] Whether these are genuinely national security issues is a matter of opinion.

Conclusion

To examine the influence of the life adjustment movement on curriculum is relevant because that influence is still very present. Because the 1950's ended with Conant's The American High School Today and with the Woods Hole Conference chaired by Jerome Bruner, the tendency exists to view life adjustment as a movement that was overpowered by the intellectual critics of the decade, and that the only lasting curriculum change of the period was the one identified with the notions of structure, readiness, intuition, and inquiry. We know now that such an assumption is incorrect. An analysis of 6000 high school transcripts for the period 1964-1980 done for the National Commission on Excellence in Education shows that students have migrated from college preparation and vocational programs to general track programs in large numbers. The proportion of students in general programs of study is up from 12 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1979. Twenty-five percent of the credits earned by general track students are in physical and health education, school-work programs, remedial courses, and personal service courses such as driver education and training for adulthood and marriage.[36] In an analysis of American education done a few years ago, Fred and Grace Hechinger wrote that "no one [educational] movement has ever swept the country; no earlier reform ever disappears completely."[37] If this is correct, as it appears to be,there

must be some wisdom to be gained from a more careful analysis of the earlier battle between the discipline and the needs of everyday life.

Curriculum reform movements in the past have proceeded unhampered by the insights of historical reflection.[38] While this criticism has been made before, it seems appropriate still judging from the inadequacies of the curricular conceptions found in well-known suggestions like The Nation at Risk and The Paideia Proposal. As Kliebard has argued, "we are bound to take into account not just the thing to be taught, but who is taught."[39] An incomplete analysis can only produce incomplete solutions, as the curricular reform efforts of the 1950's and early 1960's demonstrate. While the excesses of life adjustment educators made them an easy target for ridicule, we should not forget that in their enthusiastic concern for the needs of youth they remind us of the simple truth that education is a human enterprise, and that humans are more than the sum of the"five new basics."

As a scholarly issue, further study of life adjustment curriculum is encouraged by the suggestion made by Kliebard and Franklin in their recent analysis of the history of curriculum.[40] There are social control aspects to life adjustment that are obvious;[41] equally obvious are the passionate and well intentioned efforts of the school people who were so easily coaxed into writing the "how we did it back home" materials on the making of good citizens, workers, and home members. The interplay between these two motivating forces must be the real story behind life adjustment education. Moreover, that story can be found in schools and offices in what must be an enormous array of uncatalogued and dispersed material. This paper was intended to suggest some of the things to look for along the way.

NOTES

[1]Office of Education, A Look Ahead in Secondary Education: Report of the Second Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth, Washington, 1954, 1-7.

[2]Arthur Bestor, Educational Wastelands, Urbana, 1953, chapter 6; Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, New York, 1962, chapter 13.

[3]Lawrence Cremin, The Transformation of the School, New York, 1961, 338; Herbert Kliebard, "The Drive for Curriculum Change in the United States. 1890-1958: II - From Local Reform to a National Preoccupation," Journal of Curriculum Studies, 11 (Oct.-Dec., 1979), 284.

[4]Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980, New York, 1983, chapter 2.

[5]Donald Kitch, "The Counselor's Stake in Life Adjustment Education," Occupations, 29 (March, 1951), 423-426. See also Ramon Charles, "Guidance Services for Life Adjustment Education," in Franklin Zeran, ed., Life Adjustment in Action, New York, 1953, 371-390; and J.W. McDaniel, "Guidance for Life Adjustment" in Harl Douglass, ed., Education for Life Adjustment, New York, 1950, 314-331.

[6]Roger Aubrey, "Historical Development of Guidance and Counseling and Implications for the Future," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 55 (Feb., 1977), 288-295.

[7]Sister Mary Janet, "The Future of Life Adjustment Education," National Catholic Educational Association Bulletin, 47 (Nov., 1950), 11.

[8]A Look Ahead in Secondary Education, 50.

[9]Benjamin Willis, "Life Adjustment Education for Youth," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 33 (April, 1949), 99; J. Dan Hull, "Planning Learning for Life Adjustment," Proceedings of the Middle State Council for the Social Studies, 1949/1950, 30-31; Sister Virginia Maria, "Life Adjustment Program of a Catholic High School," Catholic Education Review, 49 (April, 1951), 253-256; Sister Mary Janet, "The Catholic Schools and Life Adjustment Education," National Catholic Educational Association Proceedings, 1952, 343-344.

[10]Federal Security Agency/Office of Education, Life Adjustment Education For Every Youth, Washington, 1948, 15.

[11]Ibid., 22. Italics in original.

[12]Federal Security Agency/Office of Education, Vitalizing Secondary Education: Report of the First Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youths, Washington, 1951, 36.

[13]Benjamin Willis, "Life Adjustment Education for Youth," Bulletin of The National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 33 (April, 1949), 106.

[14]Walter Gaumnitz, "Life Adjustment-Seven Years After," California Journal of Secondary Education, 27 (Nov., 1952), 412-417.

[15]R. Lee Hornbake, "The Quest for Life-Adjustment Education," Industrial and Vocational Education, 39 (Jan., 1950),1.

[16]Vitalizing Secondary Education, Chapter 2; and Galen Jones, "Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth, " Educational Outlook, 24 (Jan., 1950), 64-65.

[17]Speeches by Vernon Mickell and Harl Douglass on "How Can We Develop An Effective Program of Education for Life Adjustment," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principles, 33 (April, 1949), 153-159; Donald McIntosh , "Launching a Life Adjustment Program," California Journal of Secondary Education, 25 (Nov., 1950), 411-416; Glenn Varner, et al., "What Basic Policies are Essential in a State Wide Adjustment Education Program," and "How Do You Get a State-Wide Life Adjustment Education Program Under Way?" Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 36 (April, 1952), 232-282; Walter Gaumnitz, et.al., "What is the Role of the State Principals Association and Other State Professional and Lay Organizations in Promoting Life Adjustment Education?" and "What is the Role of the Principal in Promoting a Life Adjustment Education Program in His School?" Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 37 (April, 1953), 281-317.

[18]Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth, 97.

[19]Vitalizing Secondary Education, 92.

[20]Harvey Kantor and David Tyack, Work, Youth, and Schooling, Stanford, 1982.

[21]Raymond Gregory, "The Program of Life Adjustment Education on the National Level," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 35 (April, 1951), 172.

[22]Jones, 63-64.

[23]Cremin, 328-333, and Ravitch, 66.

[24]Vitalizing Secondary Education, 10-30.

[25]Edward Krug, The Shaping of the American High School, 1920-1941, Madison, 1972, Chapter 10.

[26]Charles Prosser, Secondary Education and Life, Cambridge,1939, 1.

[27]Ibid., 5.

[28]Paul Jacobson, "How Can We Organize the High-School Curriculum to Serve the Life Problems of Youth," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 34 (Jan., 1950), 209-214; and Carl Franzen "Life Adjustment and the Four Major Objectives of Secondary Education." Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 35 (Oct. 1951), 99-111.

[29]Lloyd Michaels, et al., "How Can Common Learnings, Core Curriculum, and Improved Subject Offerings Be Used in Life Adjustment Education?" Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 36 (April, 1952), 232-251; Vitalizing Secondary Education, 73-79; George Robert Carlsen, "Education for Life Adjustment Through English," in Douglass, Education for Life Adjustment, 107; and Harl Douglass, Secondary Education for Life Adjustment of American Youth, New York, 1952, chapter 8.

[30]Paul Boynton, "Business Education for Life," American Business Education, 10 (Oct. 1953), 17-19.

[31]Vitalizing Secondary Education, 91, and Bruce Allingham, "Senior Seminar for Life Adjustment," Clearing House, 26 (Feb., 1952), 345.

[32]Bernard Jordon and Harry Spencer, "Supervised Work Experience Programs in Life Adjustment Education," in Franklin Zeran, ed., Life Adjustment in Action, New York, 1953, 413-432.

[33]Mary Laxson and Howard Cummings, "Education for Home and Family Living in Life Adjustment Education," Practical Home Economics, 30 (March, 1952), 138.

[34]Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth, 69.

[35]Mildred Weigly Wood, "Reconditioning Homemaking Programs," Practical Home Economics, 30 (May, 1952), 202-204.

[36]A Nation at Risk, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1983. 18-19; Ernest Boyer, High School, New York, 1983, 73-74.

[37]Fred and Grace Hechinger, Growing Up in America, New York, 1975, 4.

[38]John Goodlad, "Curriculum: A Janus Look," The Record-Teachers College, 70 (Nov., 1968), 97; and Arno Bellack, "History of Curriculum Thought and Practice," Review of Educational Research, 39 (June, 1969), 283.

[39]Herbert Kliebard, "Systematic Curriculum Development, 1890-1959," in Jon Schaffarzick and Gary Sykes, eds., Value Conflicts and Curriculum Issues, Berkeley, 1979, 203.

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[41]On educational social control themes following World War II see Joel Spring, The Sorting Machine, New York, 1976.